

BRIXHAM SANITARY AUTHORITY.

Devon

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

AND

Summary of the
Inspector of Nuisances' Report.

 1920. 

BRIXHAM :

S. G. GOAD, PRINTER & STATIONER, FORE STREET.

REPORT ON THE Brixham Urban District For 1920.

January 31st, 1921.

Mr. Chairman & Gentlemen,

I have the honour to present to you the report on the health of the district for the year 1920.

It would be presumption in one who has held the post of your Medical Officer of Health for so short a period, and whose knowledge of Brixham is equally brief, to over elaborate details. Under such circumstances I feel sure both you, Gentlemen, and the Authorities at the Ministry of Health, will pardon this report being more or less a statement of statistics, and that any incidental remarks and criticisms are simply in the nature of ruminations of one who compares conditions here with those pertaining to the state of things in the north of England, where most of his working life has been spent.

BIRTHS. During the year 219 were registered, as against 153 in 1918, giving a rate of 26.294 per 1,000; of these 121 were male births and 98 female. The number of illegitimate births was 8.

DEATHS. The total for the year was 129, giving a rate of 16.339 per 1,000, as against 121 in 1918. This included 11 outside the district. Under the ages of 1 year there were 19, as against 13 in 1918, giving a rate of practically 100 per 1,000 births. Of those 19, ten were due to congenital debility and premature birth, the other 9 resulting from Measles 1, Meningitis 2, Pneumonia 3, Infantile Diarrhoea 1, Congenital Syphilis 1, and Icterus 1. Bluntly expressed it is an appalling fact that one of every ten babies born in Brixham dies before its first birthday, and one cannot help feeling that at least in the case of those suffering from congenital debility and premature birth who survive long enough to attend the Maternity Centre, a good deal might be done to reduce the mortality. Taking the deaths at all ages the striking fact is the large number due to organic heart disease and diseases of the blood vessels. The total number of deaths from the former cause was 20, of these 17 occurred over the age of 65, 11 died from cerebral hemorrhage and 12 from Nephritis. I think I am correct in saying that Organic Heart Disease is common in Brixham, and that high blood pressure is to be found in the majority of elderly people, and it is a curious reflection that the latter condition, which is so common as the result of the overstrain and hustle of modern commercial and industrial life, should also be so common among both men and women in the comparative solitudes of South Devon. But, bearing on this question, it has to be remembered that in Brixham old age is old age, 80 years are worn lightly in many cases, consequently diseases of heart and blood vessels have time to come to a fuller and possibly more natural development than in districts where years are short.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE. Tuberculous Disease. During the year 4 cases of Tuberculosis of bone and of skin, and 30 of Phthisis were notified. Of these 30, 3 were cases coming into the district for health reasons, this emphasises—it has been pointed out before—the risk of infection in a district looked on as suitable for the cure of such cases, and it is time that steps were taken to ensure that the arrival and departure of every Phthisis patient should be officially notified so that efficient disinfection may be carried out and as much protection as possible given to the other residents in the house. As it is, one has the feeling that there is a good deal of Phthisis in Brixham, itself, a curious reflection when one remembers that to the balmy airs of South Devon many chest cases are sent, whether it is due to the dampness, the housing, or to much inter-marriage, must be left to those who are more experienced than the writer. The deaths during 1920 numbered 9, one of these being a non-resident.

In May there was a wide-spread outbreak of measles of a mild type, only two deaths resulting. It was necessary to close the schools for three weeks, after re-opening few cases occurred. During this epidemic, as on many other occasions, I received much help from the watchfulness and common sense of the teachers, and also from Mr. Hannaford.

Nineteen cases of Diphtheria were notified, with three deaths, most of the cases taking place during the last three months of the year. Mr. Woodman was of the utmost help to me in trying to fix on the cause, for most of the cases occurred

in the Higher Brixham area. One carrier was discovered coming casually to the Maternity Centre and complaining only of a slight cold in the head, this case was treated with a most satisfactory result. It is known that two of the deaths were in cases where medical assistance was summoned only at the last moment, and, in fairness, one ought to say that many of the cases were so slight that only bacteriological examination made a definite diagnosis possible.

Two cases of Typhoid occurred, one a sailor who was landed off a ship, the other a young woman, the latter case died, the second death occurring in an Institution outside the district.

PNEUMONIA. Fourteen cases were notified with twelve deaths. At the first glance this is staggering, but during the early months of the year it had been forgotten that pneumonia was a notifiable disease and I had to remind the doctors of the district of the fact, hence the disparity.

Only one case of Scarlet Fever was reported.

There was a slight outbreak of whooping cough in early summer, many of the cases occurring in children who were convalescent from measles, and a more widespread epidemic has occurred during the last two months of the year. As during the measles epidemic, I have to thank the teachers for keeping me informed and excluding cases promptly, and Mr. Hannaford for following cases up. But many parents fail utterly to realize the infectious nature of this disease, and, while one quite appreciates the difficulties, in many cases whooping cough is spread by the free association of infected children with the healthy.

MATERNITY CENTRE. Most satisfactory progress is being made, and one is justified in feeling that the Centre is doing good work. The Church House, where the Centre was originally held, apart from being too cramped, was in many ways unsuitable, and satisfactory accommodation has now been found in the Wesleyan Schoolroom. It will readily be understood that work of this kind, novel as it was, and at its beginning not altogether popular, had much prejudice and opposition to encounter. But attendances are good and are increasing, and apart altogether from advice given and watchful supervision over the children, the work is of greater value in the interest it arouses in the mothers who have more than repaid it by the anxiety they show to carry on the rearing of their child on sound lines. To the enthusiasm of Mrs. Littler and her Committee, no less than to the energy of the permanent officials, the Centre owes much.

ISOLATION HOSPITAL. This—for Brixham—pressing question has been brought to the front by an incident which occurred during the last illness of Dr. Elliott, and still more by the fact that any day a ship, some of whose crew may be suffering from infectious disease, may put in the Port. The present small Hospital would be of no use, it possesses no kitchen and no proper accommodation for the nursing staff. Negotiations are at present being conducted between the authorities of Paignton and Brixham, and it is hoped that very soon a working arrangement will be come to whereby cases of infectious disease occurring in or coming into the area may receive institutional treatment at the Paignton Fever Hospital.

Causes of, and Ages at Death during the Year 1920.

Net Deaths at the subjoined ages of "Residents" whether occurring within or without the District.

CAUSES OF DEATH.

	All Ages	Under 1 year	1 & under 2	2 & under 5	5 & under 15	15 & under 25	25 & under 45	45 & under 65	65 & upwards
Enteric Fever	2						1	1	
Small Pox	...								
Measles	2	1	1						
Scarlet Fever	...								
Whooping Cough	...								
Diphtheria and Croup	3				3				
Influenza	3			1				2	
Erysipelas	...								
Phthisis	...					3	4	2	
Tuberculous Meningitis	9								
Other Tuberculous Diseases	1				1				
Cancer	6						1	4	1
Rheumatic Fever	...								
Meningitis	3	2							1
Organic Heart	20					1		2	17
Bronchitis	4								4
Pneumonia	12	3	1	2			2	2	2
Other Respiratory Diseases									
Diarrhoea and Enteritis	3	1		1					1
Appendicitis	...								
Cirrhosis of Liver & Gall Stone	1								1
Alcoholism	...								
Nephritis	12					1	1	4	5
Puerperal Fever and other diseases of Pregnancy	...								
Congenital Debility and Premature Birth	10	10							
Violent Deaths	3				1				2
Suicides	2							1	1
Diseases ill-defined	10								10
Other Defined Diseases									
Gangrene of Leg	2							1	1
Diabetes	1						1		
Disseminated Scleritis	1						1		
Cerebral Hemorrhage	11							4	7
Congenital Syphilis	1	1							
Tonsilitis	1					1			
Icterus Neonatorum	1	1							
Hernia	2								2
Septicæmia	1							1	
Cystitis	1								1
Total All Causes	128	19	2	3	7	6	11	26	54

VENEREAL CLINIC. After consulting with the County Medical Officer of Health, it has been decided not to establish a Clinic here, the district is too small to justify the expense, and Torquay, a few miles off, affords all necessary facilities.

HOSPITAL. The Brixham Cottage Hospital, though as ever crippled by shortage of funds, has done a good year's work, and its popularity is undeniable. Both natives and many shipping cases owe it a deep debt of gratitude. The provision of a thoroughly trained District Nurse is an almost urgent need, the fulfilment of which is prevented only by lack of funds. The present system whereby one of the Maternity Nurses does what district nursing she has time for is a very bad one.

HOUSING. The new houses are approaching completion, but there can be little doubt that Brixham will be faced with a big, if slow, undertaking in tackling the utterly insanitary condition of much of its property. Like so many other "picturesque" fishing towns—few of them can compare with Brixham in the quality of its cliff set beauty—which owe their effects to the apparently promiscuous planting of houses in their own little freeholds at all levels, and in contiguity, the sanitary question is sacrificed, and while the majority of the houses do get a fair share of air and sunlight, many of them, especially about the Quay and to some extent in Higher Brixham, are so confined that there is room neither for decent ventilation nor for efficient sanitation. The difficulty at the present time is very great, but in their own interest, if for no other, it is strongly advisable that owners of older houses should undertake necessary repairs otherwise they are likely to find that if things drift the Ministry

of Health is sure when the time is ripe to make in certain districts wholesale closing orders.

MILK SUPPLY. The quality of milk supplied to Brixham is good and taking it all round the conditions under which it is retailed are fairly satisfactory. Several of the farms are excellent, but in others, where the buildings are of older type, the ventilation and cubic capacity of the byres are hardly up to the modern standard, and in some cases the proximity of large manure heaps is most undesirable.

From the Public Health point of view the question of the Motor Traffic in New Road deserves consideration, particularly in the case of Motor Buses, and the time is approaching when it should be considered whether the buses should not be parked outside Brixham or whether a speed limit should not be imposed within the boundaries of Brixham. Motor Buses in Fore Street are dangerous. In New Road there is plenty of room for them, but the dust created is a great danger to the Public Health.

During the last year the district and your Council have suffered a great loss by the death of Dr. G. B. Elliott. Dr. Elliott had been in practice in Brixham for 30 years, and for the greater part of that time had served most faithfully as your Medical Officer of Health. He was an unusually able practitioner, a man of strong personality and character, respected and held in high regard by the community, who carried out his duties zealously and fearlessly, and whose early death after the hardships of war service leaves to those who were his friends a gap which will not be readily filled.

Later in 1920 Mr. Lowe, your Sanitary Inspector, retired after many years of valuable work. The writer owes him a debt for much wise advice and information, and is glad of the opportunity of paying a small tribute to one who served Brixham well. In Mr. Woodman a zealous and enthusiastic successor has been found.

NOTIFICATION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

Pneumonia	...	...	...	...	14
Scarlet Fever	...	...	...	...	1
Diphtheria	...	...	...	...	19
Erysipelas	...	...	...	...	3
Tuberculous Disease of Bone and Skin				...	4
Typhoid	...	...	...	...	2
Phthisis	...	...	...	...	30
				Total	73

BIRTHS.

Male	...	...	...	...	121
Female	...	...	...	...	98
				Total	219

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES F. FALCONER,
M.O.H.

TOWN HALL,

BRIXHAM.

*To the Chairman and Members
of the Brixham Urban District Council.*

Gentlemen,

When presenting my first Annual Report I would point out that when I took up duty in Brixham last October the town had the arrears of work of the period of hostilities to overtake, and there can be no doubt that the dilapidations arise from the shortage of labour and materials and from the considerate manner the owners of property have met me, and in the majority of cases carried out my suggestions. I am confident that my next report will be an epitome of improvements effected.

In the majority of dwelling houses the Water Closet Flushing Cisterns are in direct communication with the Town Main, and there is a perpetual danger of contamination of your water supply.

I have inspected 743 dwelling houses, and am impressed by (1) the number of back to back houses; (2) in some districts the crowding on space; (3) the dilapidated state of many of the inhabited houses; (4) general absence of Larders or Food Stores; (5) insanitary receptacles used for house refuse; (6) improperly trapped drains, both in the houses and outside; (7) waste water pipes connecting directly into the drain; (8) and the number of Water Closets not provided with any Flushing Apparatus and placed in improper positions; (9) and the enormous number of ruined houses.

The Slaughter Houses are kept very clean, but the absence of drains and the method of dealing with blood and garbage are

not satisfactory. The standard of quality of meat is high; I have only seized two lots of meat, one for tuberculosis and one for unsoundness.

The Fried Fish Shops are particularly clean.

The Bakehouses are quite satisfactory, two of them being a credit to any town.

With regard to the milk supply, in my opinion a higher standard could be attained. It is not satisfactory to retail milk from carts and shops where all sorts of commodities are sold. Many of the Cowsheds are badly ventilated and lighted, with water supplied by wells contaminated by the yard filth and manure, and there can be no question that they do not conform with the Dairies, Milkshops, and Cowsheds (1910) Regulations.

You have in your district Slaughterhouses 5, Bakehouses 8, Factories 24, Cowsheds, Milk-shops and Dairies 30, Fried Fish Shops 2; all of which are under constant supervision.

I have disinfected 39 houses, paid 84 visits in connection with infectious disease, served 66 Intimation Notices, 4 Statutory Notices, 27 Notices to provide Water Closets with Flushing Apparatus, 1 Notice under the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919, Section 28, and applied to you to put into operation 1 Closing Order under the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1910.

I am carrying out the re-registration of Milk-sellers, enforcing the provision of sanitary ash-bins for trade premises.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

A. J. WOODMAN.

